

Testimony before the Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee of the Whole  
Friday, May 23, 2008

**“Public Education Reform Independent Evaluator Approval Resolution of  
2008”**

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Deputy Mayor for Education

Good morning, Chairman Gray and other members of the Committee. I am Victor Reinoso, Deputy Mayor for Education, and I am joined here today by Dr. Kenneth Wong. I am happy to be here today to testify before the Council on the “Public Education Reform Independent Evaluator Approval Resolution of 2008.” More significantly, I am here to present to the Council and the public the excellent independent evaluation team that will assess and evaluate our progress toward achieving results in reforming and improving the District’s education system over the next five years.

The Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 proposed radical and sweeping changes for the District’s public education system. At the heart of the legislation proposed by the Mayor was the call for clear and direct accountability for the results of the District of Columbia Public Schools. By assuming control of the school system, the Mayor stood before the residents of the

District and asked to be held accountable for whether or not our schools and our students were succeeding. Since then, we have already begun to transform DCPS and we have made significant progress.

- We have hired an aggressive, dynamic Chancellor to lead the school system;
- We have hired a top-notch Director for the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization to repair and modernize our school facilities, which have seen an unprecedented amount of work already in the past 9 months;
- We have separated state and local responsibilities, strengthening the District's state education agency while enabling the Chancellor to focus on her top priority of reforming DCPS schools;
- We have begun to institute model customer service through the establishment of the District's first education Ombudsman and reform of DCPS central office customer service operations;
- We have established, with the overwhelming support of the Council, landmark personnel authority that allows the Chancellor to establish a culture of accountability throughout the central office;
- We have begun to rightsize the school system so that resources and investments are felt by students and teachers in more classrooms; and
- We have developed an aggressive set of plans to restructure the District's lowest-performing schools and are carrying out changes in leadership at schools across the system.

In approving the Mayor's legislation to make all of this possible, the Council wisely added a requirement that the progress of our reform efforts be independent assessed and evaluated annually. This is a critical component of the reform model we are implementing – the ability to demonstrate to the public that we are making progress and achieving sound results according to defined, transparent benchmarks will enable us to continue to build and maintain public support for our efforts. We share the Council's desire to ensure that any measurement of the results is credible and beyond impeachment; just as we intend for our work to be held up as a model for other jurisdictions seeking radical urban education reform, we know that the evaluation of that work must be a model as well.

### **Independent Evaluation Team**

Dr. Kenneth Wong and Dr. Rick Hess are nationally recognized experts in the areas of urban education reform, national best practices regarding student achievement, and mayoral control of public school systems. They are the preeminent scholars in their field and we are excited that they have agreed to serve in this capacity. Since Dr. Wong is here today, I will let him speak to how he and Dr. Hess will bring their wealth of expertise and knowledge to the evaluation. But I do want to take a moment to illustrate for the Council and the public why they were selected as the independent evaluation team.

Dr. Kenneth Wong chairs the Education Department at Brown University, where he holds the Walter and Leonore Annenberg Chair in Education Policy and directs the graduate program in Urban Education Policy. He is the author of numerous articles and books on the topics of urban education reform, innovations in education policy, and mayoral control of school districts. Most

recently, he published The Education Mayor: Improving America's Schools and Successful School and Educational Accountability. Numerous foundations and federal agencies and programs have supported his work and the value it provides to the national dialogue about urban education reform. Dr. Wong has also served as an advisor to many public officials regarding the design and implementation of accountability frameworks – we remember his instructive testimony regarding the Public Education Reform Amendment Act at the Council hearing last spring.

Dr. Rick Hess is a Resident Scholar and the Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute. He taught education and politics at the University of Virginia and education policy at Georgetown University and has lectured at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. His areas of expertise include accountability, collective bargaining, No Child Left Behind, teacher and administrative preparation and licensure, school governance. Dr. Hess has authored several books, dozens of articles and numerous other publications on nearly every topic in urban education reform. Most recently, he published an article in the American Journal of Education assessing mayoral control. In 2005, Dr. Hess ran a major assessment of the San Diego reform efforts and serves on the review board for the Broad Prize in Urban Education, experience that will be useful in looking at our efforts here in the District. Perhaps his most important (and probably most challenging) job was that of a high school social studies teacher in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Dr. Wong and Dr. Hess bring to the District's education reform efforts the national credibility, experience, and critical perspective necessary to provide an accurate, fair, and instructive evaluation of our achievements, and we are anxious to begin the work with them.

### **Process for Selecting the Evaluation Team**

In selecting an independent evaluator, we began by looking at what the work entailed and what outcomes the evaluation itself would assess. Section 204 of the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 requires the Mayor to conduct an annual independent evaluation of the achievement of the District of Columbia Public Schools in the areas of business practices, human resources operations, academic plans, and annual achievements made as measured against established benchmarks. There should be particular attention paid to student achievement. For the 2008 evaluation, Section 204 provides that the "annual achievements shall be measured using existing, reliable data" in lieu of pre-established benchmarks.

We developed a scope of work (attached to my testimony) and evaluation criteria that meet the requirements of Section 204 and will provide the District with an accurate, critical, and comprehensive assessment of the achievements being made within the school system under the new governance structure. Specifically, we felt it was important for the evaluator to examine how the governance change has affected our ability to get things done – we want to know the impact on decision-making, problem-solving, and reversing ineffective policies and practices. The scope of work called for an assessment of business practices; human capital operations,

including human resources, compensation, recruitment, and development; and academic achievement and accountability, including all academic plans, use of data, and accountability initiatives.

With a clear picture of what we were looking for, we then set out, under the Mayor's direction, to find the best-qualified individuals in the field who could provide the kind of thorough, critical analysis required. Among a dozen or so potential candidates, I spoke with about half and explored their qualifications, their approach to evaluating a reform effort like the one underway in the District, and their thoughts on committing to the project for the next five years.

Dr. Wong and Dr. Hess submitted an evaluation plan that more than meets the requirements of the scope of work and provides a detailed explanation of what will be measured and how. The Mayor's selection of an evaluation team rather than one individual reflects a desire to carry out a comprehensive evaluation process, one that looks at the whole picture. Dr. Wong and Dr. Hess complement each other, combining strengths and experience with operations, fiscal accountability, human capital, infrastructure, data, accountability, and academic achievement. We strongly believe this team approach will produce a high quality evaluation able to withstand the scrutiny, both locally and nationally, that comes with the bold reform agenda we are implementing.

### **Looking to the Work Ahead**

We fully intend to submit a completed evaluation to the Council by September 15, 2008, meeting the statutory deadline. The evaluation team has already begun planning with the Chancellor's

team to ensure that they have access to the information and data needed to do their work.

Thanks to the generous donation of the DC Public Education Fund, the work can begin immediately at no cost to District residents. Dr. Wong and Dr. Hess have assembled a research team and will develop a detailed workplan in the next two weeks.

Following are a few details of how the first year evaluation will be completed:

- The evaluation team will utilize a two-pronged approach to measuring academic progress: infrastructure and policies to strengthen academic accountability and academic performance of students, schools, and the District. Because this year is the first traditional reform year, the analysis of academic achievement will use 2007 student performance data as a baseline year and focus on performance consistent with the NCLB accountability framework.
- The assessment of business practices will focus on efforts to build a functional system that supports school leaders and classrooms. The evaluation team will look at central office accountability measures, financial management, resource allocation, textbook and supply ordering and distribution, food services, class schedule development, transcript processing, facilities maintenance and repairs, school safety measures, and IT and data management.
- Finally, the evaluation will include an extensive review of human capital operations, the single most crucial element of the system's business services. The team will assess our abilities to recruit, train, track and evaluate the progress of, support, compensate, and hold accountable a high quality school workforce.

Reiterating a point made earlier in my testimony, I want to emphasize the Administration's commitment to conducting a high quality, independent evaluation that will instruct us, as public officials, and the public on the results of our reform efforts. We share the Council's goal in ensuring that we can demonstrate achievement. It is critical to us that we know where we are making progress and where we need to push to do even more – the Mayor is serious about accountability and truly believes that a relentless focus on the bottom line results – student achievement and excellent learning opportunities – will lead to real change and secure a strong future for the District.

This concludes my testimony. I look forward to your questions.